

Millipedes and Centipedes

Phillip E. Sloderbeck
Entomologist, Southwest Area Office

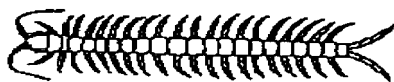
Introduction

Centipedes and millipedes are distant relatives of lobsters, crayfish and shrimp. Unlike their marine cousins, centipedes and millipedes are land dwellers, but they do prefer moist habitats or areas of high humidity. They usually are considered nuisances rather than destructive pests. Centipedes pose an occasional threat to man because they have poison glands and will bite. Although usually not life threatening, their bites can cause some pain and swelling. Millipedes may occasionally damage seedling plants by feeding on stems and leaves.

Centipedes

There are many species of centipedes. They vary in size from about an inch in length to more than 6 inches. Centipedes have flattened, elongated, segmented bodies with one pair of legs on most of their body segments. They have a distinct head with a pair of long, many segmented antennae. Jaws located on the first body segment behind the head are connected to poison glands that are used to kill insects and other small creatures for food.

While most centipedes live mainly outdoors and only accidentally enter houses, the house centipede, *Scutigera coleoptrata*, is capable of reproducing in



Centipede

homes. Although centipedes are beneficial in that they destroy other insects, most people have an aversion to their presence in homes.

Millipedes

Millipedes normally live outdoors where they feed on damp and decaying wood and vegetable matter, as well as tender roots and green leaves. Their slow-crawling, rounded bodies have two pairs of legs on most body segments. They are generally brownish in color and about 1 to 1½ inch in length. Millipedes protect themselves by means of glands that secrete an unpleasant odor. Millipedes are most troublesome in the fall, when hordes may crawl into homes, presumably seeking shelter.



Millipede

Control Measures

Because household infestations generally result from high populations outside the home, it is usually difficult to obtain complete control unless the outside premises are treated. Historically, wettable powder formulations of carbamate insecticides such as carbaryl (Sevin) or propoxur (Baygon) have been recommended for millipede control. Recently many new insecticides have come on the market. Many of the new products contain synthetic pyrethroids with names such as allethrin, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin,

cypermethrin, deltamethrin, esfenvalerate, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, resmethrin, tetramethrin and tralomethrin. Because there are hundreds of products on the market, it is best to visit a local supplier of lawn or home insecticides and look for a product labeled for the pest and the location you want to treat.

In general, for treatments outside the home, insecticides should be applied to form a barrier of 5 to 10 feet around the structure. Treatments must be thorough and cover foundation walls, steps, porches, window wells, sidewalks and especially doorways and other openings. It may be helpful to remove plant mulch, leaves, boards, rocks, compost piles, etc., to remove hiding places and aid control.

In the home, first decide if the problem can be easily controlled by hand-picking or vacuuming to remove individuals. This may be all that is needed, if populations are minimal. If populations are high or persistent, the use of an insecticide may be justified. Contact or aerosol sprays may be applied directly to centipedes or millipedes for quick knockdown, but their effects are short lived. Residual sprays can be used to treat baseboards, cracks, crevices and other hiding places. Some bait and dust formulations also may be available for use under sinks and refrigerators.

CAUTION: Regardless of the chemical(s), read and follow the manufacturer's label carefully.

Originally Adapted from: Centipedes and Millipedes L-1747 House and Landscape Pests, J. W. Stewart Texas, Agricultural Extension Service, July 1979

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit Phillip E. Sloderbeck Millipedes and Centipedes, Kansas State University, November 2004

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

EP-121

November 2004

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Fred A. Cholick, Director.